HEROES

CHAPTER 75

A LESSON IN ELECTRICITY

The only major writing on the mystery of Ben Franklin's famous kite flying experiment comes from Joseph Priestly's account, published fifteen years afterwards. Franklin made many major discoveries in his lifetime, but some details he chose to keep to himself.

A LESSON IN ELECTRICITY

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From the journal of Joseph Priestley. November 8, 1767.

TING T-TING

It is with great apprehension that I write this entry...

NNNGGHHH... BENJAMIN....

TING TING TING

...but after several years of secrecy and consternation, I feel the truth must be explored.

BENJAMIN? THOSE INFERNAL BELLS OF YOURS ARE *RINGING* AGAIN! BEN?!

The truth about a colleague and dear friend of mine...

BEN! YOUR *BELLS!*

...Benjamin Franklin...

HNH? I--WHU--MY-- MY BELLS? WHAT DO YOU MEAN MY--

...And his famous experiment that changed our understanding of electricity forever.

CAN'T YOU INVENT A QUIETER WAY TO CONDUCT YOUR EXPER--

MY *BELLS!*

Although he was a sophisticated gentleman and world class statesman, Ben had a childlike curiosity about him.

FATHER? IS EVERYTHING ALL RIGHT?

THE BELLS ARE RINGING, WILL! ISN'T THAT *WONDERFUL?!*

He relished every small discovery, and, once he was interested, needed to thoroughly under~stand anything and everything about a myriad of topics...

...including, in this case, lightning.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom of the day, Mr. Franklin believed that lightning was, in fact, made of electricity~and that it could be controlled.

To prove it, he first attached a large strip of iron to his roof and connected it to a series of bells.

This, he surmised, would alert him when there was lightning in the area.

Armed with this knowledge, he was determined to find a way to "capture" the lightning...

...thus proving that the so-called "Law of Conservation of Charge" applied to lightning.

MOTHER WISHES TO KNOW IF SHE CAN EXPECT YOU FOR BREAKFAST THIS MORNING.

But to do so, he was going to need some help.

AH, WILLIAM. I'M GLAD YOU'RE HERE. THERE'S SOMETHING I NEED TO SPEAK WITH YOU ABOUT...

Several days later, when he had the proper supplies and the weather conditions were favorable, they set out to conduct his experiment.

PLEASE HURRY, WILL. THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME!

GOOD AFTERNOON, MISTER FRANKLIN. I TRUST WHATEVER ACTIVITY YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR THIS AFTERNOON WILL BE QUIETER THAN THOSE BELLS THAT KEEP MY WIFE AND I UP FOR HALF THE NIGHT.

MY APOLOGIES, MR. BRADY. THEY SHAN'T BOTHER YOU MUCH LONGER. MY WORK IS NEARLY COMPLETE.

When Deborah asked where they were going on such a stormy day, Ben replied, simply...

...to fly a kite.

HMPH. WORK, INDEED.

WHAT A KOOK!

THIS IS A PERFECT SPOT.

To prove his thesis, Franklin realized that he needed to figure out a way to bring the lightning to him.

So, as everyone eventually learned, he chose a simple kite with a key attached to it.

The twine he attached to the kite was blended with metal, and it led to a jar at the bottom which would capture whatever electricity came down the wire.

To prevent electrocution, he attached a dry silk string to the metal cord, effectively insulating him from the charge of the key.

SHOULD WE TRY TO FIND A DIFFERENT LOCATION, FATHER?

I DON'T THINK THAT WILL BE NECESSARY, WILLIAM. IT LOOKS LIKE THE SKY IS CLEARING EVERYWH--

Unfortunately there was one part of the process that he failed to consider.

FATHER?

DO YOU FEEL SOMETHING--?

He never proposed the question, what if the dry string...was wet?

KRAKOOM

WHUMMMMMPPP

FATHER! FATHER! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

WE DID IT!

PLEASE LET ME HELP YOU UP.

NOT YET.

I BELIEVE SOME CHARGE IS STILL WITHIN ME.

COME HERE, TIGER.

THAT'S A GOOD BOY.

ZZZZZZT

WILL THAT HURT HIM?

NOT WITH ALL OF THAT FUR. HE'S WELL INSULATED.

Ironically, Benjamin had proven the Law of Conservation of Charge...on himself!

Although he conducted his experiment in 1752, it wasn't until 15 years later that he made the public aware of it, in a letter to me.

People often ask me why it took so long for him to tell the world of his great discovery.

I say that it was because he didn't want anyone trying to duplicate such a dangerous experiment, so he kept it to himself until tools became available to make it safer.

But the truth of the matter lies in the part of the story that he made me swear to never repeat.

The part that, to this day, I have never told to another living soul.

That Benjamin, himself, somehow absorbed the charge.

Enough electricity to kill a man.

FRANKLIN

And he walked away unscathed.

No, the world is not ready for that part of the story yet.

Perhaps it shall never be.